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VIOLENCE IN THE CAUCASUS

BY

Colonel Albert L. Patterson III
United States Army

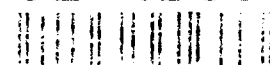
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VIOLENCE IN THE CAUCASUS

An Individual Study Project

by

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ABSTRACT

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Tremendous changes have been taking place recently in what used to be the Soviet Union. Since 1988, former Soviet President Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika produced significant changes and turmoil in the Caucasus region of the Union. This report analyzes the situation in the Caucasus region as of March 1992 with emphasis on regional political structure and status of conflicts in the area. A review of United States, Russian, Commonwealth of Independent States, Turkish, Iranian, and Saudi Arabian interests, presents insight into their potential for future involvement. Nations rushing to establish ties in this newly independent region found civil war, struggles for independence, territorial disputes, religious war, and even claims of impending genocide in the wake of Soviet retreat. The report gives descriptions of eight current conflicts and assesses their likelihood for escalation or settlement. The emerging importance of international organizations such as the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe is evident. Focus is on new demands placed on these organizations and their potential to help in conflict settlement or peacekeeping.

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INTRODUCTION

New Year's Eve 1991, the Kremlin lowered the familiar red flag of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for the last time replacing it with the white, blue, and red colors of Russia. The event signalled the end of the world's last great colonial empire amassed by the Russian czars and expanded by Joseph Stalin during World War II. This final chapter began with implementation of former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika that began to encourage public discussion of long suppressed nationalities and religious issues. By 1987, Armenians, Georgians, and others, including native Russians, were openly expressing many grievances and calling on the regime in Moscow to redress them. Rapid disintegration followed, characterized by ethnic and religious violence with many disputes over territorial boundaries. By late 1991, all former union republics had gained their independence, and on 26 December, the Supreme Soviet voted the USSR out of existence. The world community of nations had inherited new members for years influenced by the Soviet nationalities policy and its oppression.

Exploding with violence and rivalry, one region, the Caucasus, had been at the forefront striving for indepen-

dence. This region occupies the strategic isthmus between the Black and Caspian Seas south of the Caucasus Mountains containing the old Soviet republics of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. North of these mountains sat four autonomous soviet socialist republics (ASSRs) and one autonomous oblast (AO) established in Russia itself in support of the nationalities policy. The region represented a patchwork quilt of Christians and Muslims with different languages and cultures centered in these administrative subdivisions. Nations rushing to establish ties in this region found civil war, struggles for independence, territorial disputes, religious war, and even possible genocide in the wake of Soviet retreat. This report will analyze eight current conflicts (See Figure 1) assessing their likelihood for major violence and review the interests of major players in the Caucasus region.

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF CONFLICT

Faced with governing a multinational empire, Russia in December 1922 initiated the nationalities policy. The First All-Union Congress of Soviets formed the USSR and established a governmental structure through which the Communist Party could exercise control. Regions would progress from AO status to ASSR and finally to union republic (UR) reflecting the development of economies and cultures. A bicameral representative body, the Supreme Soviet, consisted

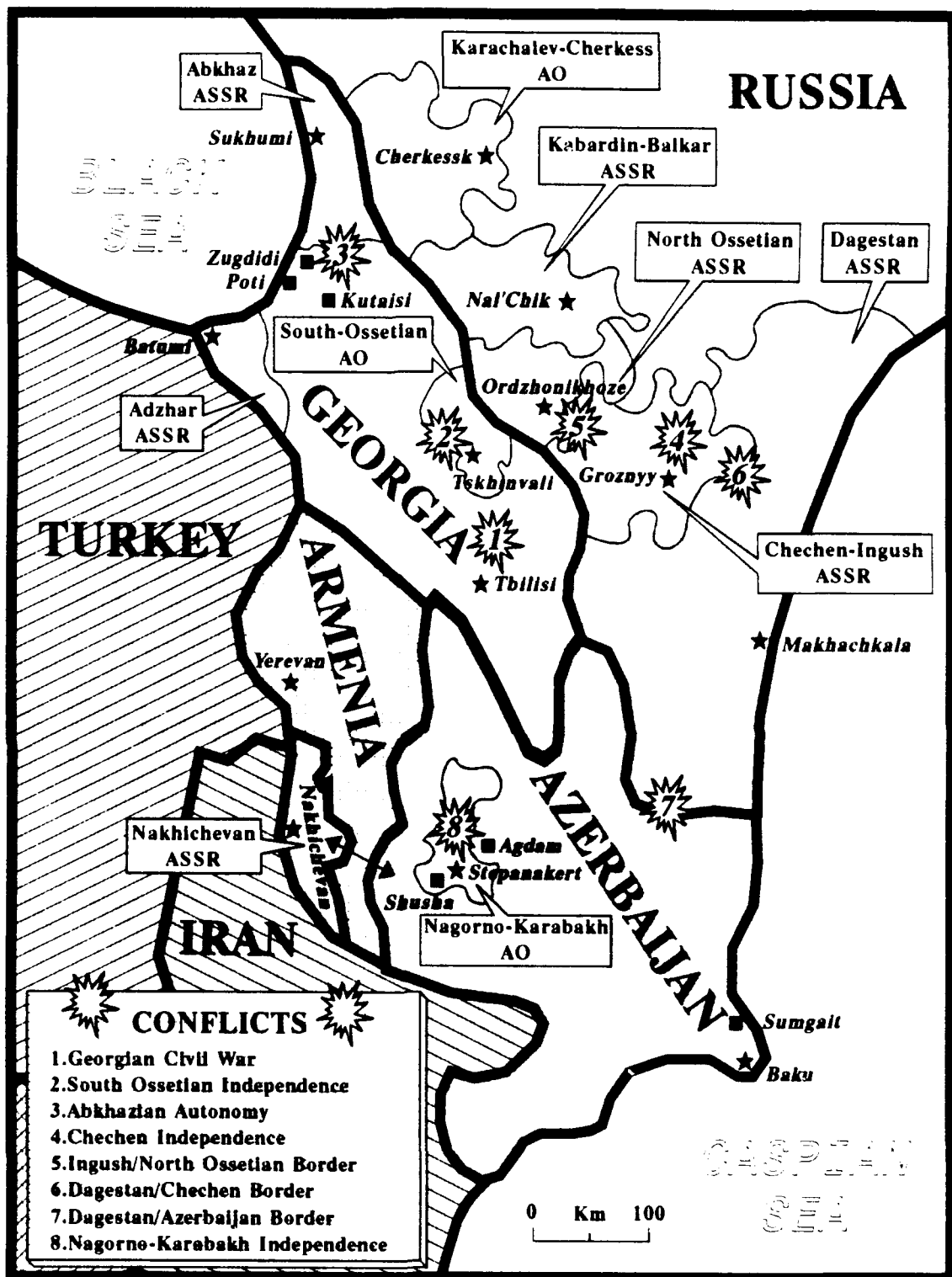


Fig. 1. Caucasus region showing union republics (URs), autonomous soviet socialist republics (ASSRs), autonomous oblasts (AOs), and current conflicts.

of the Soviet of the Union with a deputy for each 300,000 persons and the Soviet of Nationalities with deputies for each autonomous subdivision. URs had 25 deputies, ASSRs 11, AOs five, and national areas one. The Supreme Soviet exercised exclusive legislative power, selected the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Court, and the Procurator General of the USSR, and elected the 33-member Presidium to run the daily business of the Union. The multinational nature of this organization was to guarantee the free political, economic, and cultural development of each nationality in its own language during a people's transition to a full-fledged soviet state. This government settled some grievances between groups, but primarily the Red Army, troops of the Interior Ministry (MVD), and the KGB maintained order and suppressed discontent. Former President Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika ended this.

CONFLICT #1: GEORGIAN CIVIL WAR

Civil war in Georgia pitted Georgian against Georgian in the overthrow of Georgia's first democratically elected president. Following a distinguished career dedicated to human rights and opposition to Soviet oppression, Zviad Gamsakhurdia became president on 26 May 1991 with 86.5 percent of the vote. He had tremendous popular support particularly from rural parts of the country. Since the National Democratic Party and the National Independence

Party boycotted the election, however, his own Round Table Coalition established a government with no well established opposition representation.¹ Gamsakhurdia became increasingly authoritarian and dictatorial. Soon he had succeeded in antagonizing his key constituents and establishing isolationist economic policies. Many described him as a half-mad fascist. Things became so bad that Georgia was not invited to join the post-Soviet CIS.² Guram Muchaidze, leader of the Social Democratic Party, described the situation:

Incompetency in leadership, gross mistakes on the part of government, and delay with progressive economic reforms - especially agriculture - have led to sharp decline in the standard of living of working people. Disruption of economic links has done enormous damage to the republic's economy.³

On 23 September 1991, opposition forces, backed by elements of the Georgian National Guard, took control of the Tbilisi television station. The following day Gamsakhurdia declared a state of emergency. By 22 December, fighting broke out around the Georgian Parliament where the President took refuge. With increasing violence and opposition, Gamsakhurdia fled the country on 6 January. The new Georgian Military Council that took over vowed to turn power over to a provisional civilian government headed by former Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua. Council member Dzhaba Ioseliani, head of the anti-Gamsakhurdia Mkhedrioni, "White Horsemen" paramilitary squads, however, suggested the timetable would depend on how quickly life in Georgia returned to

normal.⁴ Opposition to the Military Council from pro-Gamsakhurdia elements continued.

In early February, crowds of nearly 10,000 Gamsakhurdia supporters were still demonstrating in Tbilisi.⁵ Gamsakhurdia returned to western Georgia and initiated a guerilla campaign. Reports show, however, the provisional government is making progress against his movement. Military Council member Tengiz Kitovani, leader of Georgia's National Guard, stated 90 percent of Georgia is under government control and reports Gamsakhurdia plans to flee to the Chechen Republic.⁶ Although Gamsakhurdia may still attempt to agitate for support, future significant armed confrontation in this civil war is doubtful.

On 10 March 1992, the Military Council named Eduard Shevardnadze, a native Georgian and former Soviet foreign minister, as chairman of a new provisional government, the State Council. Executive and legislative powers were given to the State Council which included former members of the Military Council. Shevardnadze has stated new elections will be held soon. Many expect him to run for parliament and head the new government.⁷ Widely respected in the West, he has created an international fund to help rebuild Georgia's economy and personally donated \$100,000.⁸ As conditions improve, Georgia's democratic institutions should be back on track.

CONFLICT #2: SOUTH OSSETIAN INDEPENDENCE

The South Ossetian AO began 20 April 1922 as part of the Soviet nationalities policy within Georgia. Descending from Persian ancestors, the population speaks Farsi and has some Muslim background. Both Islam and Christianity are present, but paganism is prevalent. The South Ossetians fought well against the Germans in World War II and thus have enjoyed close relations with the Russians.⁹ Since its creation, South Ossetia has had difficulty with its administrator, Georgia. Formation of a South Ossetian militia in 1989 provoked the formation of the nationalistic Georgian Mkhedrioni, "White Horsemen".¹⁰ Armed confrontation followed, and President Gorbachev and the Soviet government did little for fear of another incident like the "Tbilisi Massacre" of 9 April 1989.¹¹

Soon after becoming President, Gamsakhurdia abolished the South Ossetian AO and renamed it with its historical Georgian name, Samachablo. Fighting increased as South Ossetians sought to transfer to the Russian Federation.¹² Conditions worsened; 80,000 refugees moved into North Ossetia, and finally the South Ossetians made an appeal to the world community and the UN for assistance.¹³ On 29 January 1992, the South Ossetian parliament announced its independence and desire to join the Russian Federation. Fighting intensified particularly around the capital, Tskhinvali. Support came over the mountain from North Ossetia, but soon

resolve began to wane. Following Gamsakhurdia's overthrow, the provisional government gradually reduced the action around South Ossetia. The Georgian provisional government freed jailed leaders in conciliatory gestures. With over one third of the small AO destroyed and much suffering, South Ossetian leaders have dropped their movement to separate from Georgia.¹⁴ Negotiations have calmed all but some sporadic shooting, and it looks like future major violence is now unlikely.

CONFLICT #3: ABKHAZIAN AUTONOMY

Stalin created the Abkhazian ASSR in March 1921 to help fight against Menshevik elements in Tbilisi. To this date there has been a struggle between the Abkhazians and their Georgian hosts. The 1979 census indicated native Abkhazians outnumbered by settler populations; Georgians 43.9%, Abkhaz 17.1%, Russians 16.4%, and Armenians 15.1%.¹⁵ Abkhazians speak an indigenous language from the Adygo-Abkhaz linguistic group.¹⁶ Previously dominated by Christian and Muslim conquerors, the majority of Abkhazians are Orthodox Christian with some practicing Sunni Islam.¹⁷

Glasnost and perestroika have today stimulated the Abkhazians to seek greater autonomy from the Georgians. Starting in 1989 the capital, Sukhumi, was the scene of violent anti-Georgian riots that the Georgian authorities accused Russia had inspired from across the border.¹⁸ On

24 October 1991, President Gamsakhurdia suspended moves by the Abkhazian Presidium taking measures to appropriate former Soviet property stating that it was a violation of the Georgian constitution. Further conflict developed when the Congress of Mountain People met in Sukhumi in November. This organization sought to organize the peoples of the northern Caucasus into a confederation to support political and economic goals. Again Gamsakhurdia declared it illegal for Abkhazia and South Ossetia to participate in such activity.¹⁹ With the overthrow of President Gamsakhurdia the situation has calmed.

Abkhazia has clearly said that although there is pro-Gamsakhurdia fighting in western Georgia, Abkhazia is not a Gamsakhurdia stronghold.²⁰ Abkhazian authorities declared a state of emergency as they attempt to disarm about 80 pro-Gamsakhurdia supporters in the region. A recent meeting of the Abkhazian parliament stressed Abkhazia no longer wishes to violate Georgian territorial integrity.²¹ With the improved situation, reduced tension can be expected between Abkhazia and Georgia in the future.

CONFLICT #4: CHECHEN INDEPENDENCE

After originally establishing the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in December 1936, Stalin liquidated it after World War II for its alleged support of the Germans. The population was sent into exile in Kazakhstan but returned in the 1950s

during the de-Stalinization campaigns. It is no wonder the Chechen and Ingush people seek independence during this era of new freedoms. The new leader of this movement is a retired Soviet Air Force General Dzhokhar Dudayev. Described as charismatic, he is a native Chechen who was born on the train going into exile.²² Following his election to president on 27 October 1991, the Russian government declared the election results invalid. He responded by declaring Chechen independence from Russia drawing a scathing rebuke from Russian Vice President Rutskoi.²³ The Ingush, led by Beksultan Seynaroyev, wanted to keep Chechen-Ingush together, but wanted to stay with the Russian Federation in hopes of getting back lands expropriated during the deportation.²⁴

When the Chechen-Ingush received a resolution from the Russian Presidium condemning their actions, Dudayev declared a general mobilization. When Russian President Yeltsin dispatched 632 MVD troops to Groznyy, Dudayev declared martial law and told the people to take up arms. The same day the Russian Parliament voted to cancel Yeltsin's decrees and rebuked him for his strong-arm tactics. Faced with a revolt in his own parliament, Yeltsin backed down and decided to seek a political solution.²⁵ On 24 January 1992, the Russian Supreme Soviet adopted new laws setting out principles for demarcation and administration of the autonomous subdivisions.²⁶ This is where it stands. As Russia continues

to struggle with monumental problems, it also must come to terms with its former nationalities policy. The Chechens feel they are still independent, but for now armed confrontation is only slight. It is doubtful if Russia will let them go as many more like it might follow. This one does have some potential for violence in the future.

CONFLICT #5: INGUSH/NORTH OSSETIAN BORDER

When the Ingush people left their homeland in 1944, neighboring North Ossetia absorbed their Prigorodny District. Since the Ingush returned in the 1950s, they have sought the return of their lands. They are petitioning the Russian Federation for assistance under its Law on Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples which states that land expropriated from displaced persons should be returned.²⁷ The North Ossetians disagree emphatically. Their communications with Moscow suggested there may be a large-scale war in the south of Russia over the issue.²⁸ The North Ossetian Deputy Procurator, Valeriy Kozarev, said the country has been looking into either returning homes to previous owners or providing them with financial compensation.²⁹ Conflict is unlikely in the near term, but the Russian Republic must soon address the return of expropriated lands to avoid future violence.

CONFLICT #6: DAGESTAN/CHECHEN BORDER

A similar situation exists on the border between Chechen-Ingush and Dagestan. After restoration of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1957, many returning Chechens settled in part of the Stavropol Territory. This piece of Dagestan soon became part of the new Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Although the Chechens have been very vocal about the Ingush claim to North Ossetian land, they have been silent on this issue.³⁰ At this time, there is no real conflict on this question, however, as land becomes scarce in Dagestan, a claim will surely be made on the Chechen Republic.

CONFLICT #7: DAGESTAN/AZERBAIJAN BORDER

Although a strong nationalist movement exists in the neighboring Chechen Republic, no such movement exists in Dagestan. Instead, the region, composed of over 30 different groups each speaking a different language, has become wild and lawless. With each group seeking its own course, ethnic violence soon displaced many people causing tremendous refugee problems and placing increasing demands on limited land resources. Representatives of the recently formed Dagestan State Committee feel the only way Dagestan will survive is for it to form a loose federation of its disparate groups. Already the Kumyks, Noghays, and Lezghians have developed independence movements. Dagestan will attempt to settle internal disputes over territory, but on

the border with Azerbaijan, Lezghian claims overlap with Azeri claims.

"We shall go to war come 1992," came the charge from delegates of the Congress of the Lezghian People on 28 September 1991.³¹ Half a million Lezghians live on each side of the border separating Dagestan and Azerbaijan, and for years the Azeris have suppressed the Lezghian culture and oppressed their people. The Lezghian Congress has recently issued a declaration of statehood and a resolution demanding changes to the border between Dagestan and Azerbaijan so the Lezghian people can be united. To date, no significant violence has emerged, but the potential for conflict confined to the region remains.

CONFLICT #8: NAGORNO-KARABAKH (NK) INDEPENDENCE

The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) region is currently the most volatile area in the Caucasus. Pitting Muslims against Christians and Azerbaijan against Armenia, it has the greatest potential for international involvement. The Soviet Union created the NKAO to administer the large Armenian minority living in western Azerbaijan. As the host UR, Azerbaijan administered the AO with increasing animosity. In 1988, with liberalization of Soviet policies, the Armenian minority became actively discontent. A massive rally of hundreds of thousands of Armenians in Yerevan, capital of Armenia, demanded NKAO be transferred to Armenian

control.³² Starting 27 February 1988, angry Azeris rampaged in Sumgait north of Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, for three days, killing 32 and wounding hundreds of Armenians. This changed the dynamics of the dispute. Waves of violence swept Armenia intensifying in October and November 1988 as Armenians drove out nearly every Azeri.

By Summer 1989, 160,000 Azeris fled Armenia, and 200,000 Armenians fled Azerbaijan, leaving 200,000 concentrated in NKAO.³³ In Azerbaijan, the Popular Front party placed significant pressure on the Communist government to drive out Armenians and started a campaign to isolate Armenia. On 13 January 1990, Azeri mobs rampaging in the streets of the capital, Baku, resulted in the declaration of a state of emergency. Gorbachev sent an additional 12,000 troops to join 11,000 already in Baku, and on 19 and 20 January, they brutally assaulted Azeris with tanks and personnel carriers killing over 100.³⁴ Moscow took direct control of NKAO, and fighting between rival factions intensified. In one of his first acts as President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, in cooperation with President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, negotiated an agreement between fighting factions. Armenia agreed to renounce earlier claims to the disputed territory in NKAO in return for its greater self-rule. The agreement called for a cease-fire, disarming of roaming gangs, and resettlement of refugees. Key to the process was the agreement of Russia and Kazakhs-

tan to monitor the process.³⁵ Fighting ceased momentarily and then intensified bringing no real response from Yeltsin or Nazarbayev.

NKAO declared independence in the Fall of 1991 and established the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). By 28 December 1991, except for a regiment home-based in Khan-kendi, all Soviet troops had withdrawn.³⁶ Armenian self-defense forces continued attacks on Azeri villages inside and around NKR as Azeri assaults increased. Both sides broadcast accusations of attacks and atrocities against innocent civilians. On 1 January, NKR Executive Committee Chairman, Leonard Petrosyan, requested United Nations (UN) Secretary General promote official recognition of NKR. He further requested the UN send troops to prevent impending genocide of Armenian people there.³⁷ Armenia continued to supply NKR and appeal for international assistance in resolving the conflict. Requests to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which Armenia and Azerbaijan recently joined, resulted in a fact finding mission in early January. On 15 January, Armenia petitioned for UN membership and continued calls for UN assistance. New appeals went to CIS for troops in the region. Azerbaijan's petition for UN membership soon followed.

Azerbaijan's President Mutalibov expressed the Azeri position, stating the NKAO situation was an internal matter and did not warrant international intervention.³⁸ Newly

formed Azerbaijan Army forces, accompanied by elements of the Popular Front, initiated a major offensive against Armenian self-defense forces in NKR. On 31 January 1992, Radio Yerevan broadcast the following radio appeal to the UN describing the Armenian minority's apparent plight:

The Azerbaijani National Army launched a large-scale offensive against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh on the morning of 31 January. Tanks, armored cars, and artillery pieces are taking part in the offensive. . . . At the same time, Stepanakert City, Askeran Rayon Center, and the nearby Armenian villages were being subjected to intensive artillery shelling. . . . A (word indistinct) genocide of the Armenians on their own lands is taking place before the entire world. The Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh calls on the international public to urgently raise its voice against the usurpers and the organizers of the genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁹

On 3 March 1992, the last former Soviet Army unit was ordered out of NKR. The 366th Motorized Rifles had endured three weeks of intensive shelling that killed three soldiers and destroyed most of the unit's installation.⁴⁰ Although both Armenians and Azeris had accused former Soviet troops of supporting the opposite side, the Armenians resisted their departure fearing that with them would go their last protection. Fearing attack by an Azeri force estimated at 20,000, the Armenian militiamen went on the offensive attacking the NKR Azeri town of Khojaly. Initial reports claimed several dozen Azeri loses. Video tapes of the casualties, however, showed dozens of bodies lying in the snow including women and children. Azerbaijan claimed over 1,000 people had been slaughtered in the action.⁴¹

Tremendous anger spread throughout Azerbaijan, and crowds in Baku and other cities demanded President Ayaz Mutalibov's resignation. The Popular Front accused him of not doing enough to defend the Azeri minority in NKR and vowed to seek revenge for the massacre. On 6 March 1992, Mutalibov stepped down as president, and his power and authority were transferred to newly elected Parliamentary Chairman Yagub Mamedov prior to new elections. Many feared actions against Armenians in NKR would now intensify.⁴² Armenia issued a call to Armenians serving elsewhere in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to return to Armenia and seems to be building an army.⁴³ Although reports claim all nuclear weapons have been removed from the region, there is still room to doubt these claims. On 12 March, Russian Vice President Rutskoi confirmed nuclear weapons are stored in Armenia and Azerbaijan but assured their use by combatants is "1,000 percent out of the question."⁴⁴

International organizations are increasingly playing a role in the area. The UN has sent special emissary Cyrus Vance to NKR to try and mediate a truce.⁴⁵ The UN has recently accepted Armenia and Azerbaijan as full members. On 10 March 1992, a meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), an organization combining the 16 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members and 19 states of the former Communist empire (all former members except Georgia), condemned the violence in NKR. Dutch Foreign

Minister Hans van den Broeck suggested NATO peacekeeping troops could serve to supervise a possible cease-fire negotiated through CSCE. Czechoslovakia's Jiri Dienstbier, whose country holds CSCE's rotating presidency, agreed to undertake a personal mediation mission. NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner said, "NATO may well lend material support or even troops to the CSCE if needed and if agreed by our member states."⁴⁶ Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kosyrev welcomed the idea of NATO involvement in the region.⁴⁷

Efforts by regional powers have recently developed trying to broker a settlement in NKR. The CIS has proven not to be a good forum for negotiations as most Azeris view Russians as too sympathetic with the Armenian cause. Most CIS members do not want to get involved.⁴⁸ Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel has pledged to resist pressure for Turkish military action supporting Azerbaijan and is actively seeking a political solution. He urges western nations to avoid actions supporting Armenia that could lead to full-scale war and encourages them to get the Armenians to the bargaining table.⁴⁹ In Saudi Arabia, the 46-nation Islamic Conference said on 10 March it would send a delegation to Armenia and Azerbaijan.⁵⁰ Most recently, Iran hosted peace negotiations in Tehran, and on 15 March, Armenian and Azeri negotiators agreed to a cease-fire. Key elements of the agreement called for cease-fire, exchange of prisoners and

bodies, and efforts to end economic sanctions.⁵¹ These efforts indicate there may be hope for a settlement in this four-year dispute.

RUSSIA AND THE CIS

As ethnic and religious conflicts have boiled to the surface, Soviet military forces again brought order, but only temporarily. Soviet troops found themselves isolated and increasingly at odds with separatist local populations. As the power of the Moscow regime faded, the use of these forces became questionable. A major issue for the Russian Communist Party Congress on 27 June 1990 was the use of armed forces to quell ethnic violence. General Vladimir Lobov formulating military policy for the new Union said deployment of troops to resolve inter-ethnic or inter-republic disputes would be ruled out both by treaty and deployment mechanisms.⁵² His successor, Marshall Yeygeny Shaposhnikov, acting Commander-in-Chief of CIS armed forces, stated:

My view has not changed. The armed forces must not be used in solving political, national or other internal problems. It's none of the military's business. I'll do everything I can to stop any politician who tries to use the armed forces for his own ends.⁵³

These two positions well stated the desire of military forces to withdraw from the regional violence and assume more classical national defense roles. Currently being

withdrawn, CIS military forces can be expected to play less of a role in regional conflicts.

Russia is today struggling with monstrous domestic and economic issues while trying to hold together the CIS. The composition and use of CIS military forces are currently in a state of flux. Where Soviet troops were once the peacekeepers in the hot spots of the USSR, now republics are setting up national armies and seizing Soviet equipment for local use. As Russia and the CIS look externally for assistance, new demands are being placed on international peacekeeping organizations. Sergey Lavrov, Chief of the Russian Foreign Ministry International Organizations Administration, calls for a changing role for the UN. He suggests the UN's policy of nonintervention in internal affairs is not absolute and that the organization should defend human rights and freedoms. Mr. Lavrov says Russian laws are coming into line with international law. He further suggests Article 43 of the UN Charter should be reflected in their legislation providing military forces for future UN peacekeeping operations.⁵⁴ With renewed attachment to international organizations, more pressure can be expected in the future from Russia and the CIS for peacekeeping actions in their old domain.

Galina Starovoytova, advisor to Russian President Boris Yeltsin, wraps it up nicely concerning South Ossetian desire

to break from Georgia and join the Russian Federation:

From the point of view of international law, which is more important - - upholding state sovereignty and integrity of borders of a particular state, or the rights of peoples to self determination? . . . Sooner or later, the international community should set a precedent for solving such problems.⁵⁵

For decades this had no real meaning under the Soviet system. However, as Russia shrinks within its borders, apparently it intends for the world community to take over its old problems in regions like the Caucasus.

UNITED STATES (US)

With the Iron Curtain down and Russia abandoning its empire, the US and others are rushing to establish contact with the new independent republics. This is taking the form of everything from simple recognition of independent status to full diplomatic relations with significant technical and economic assistance. Humanitarian aid efforts are attempting to fill vast shortcomings in critical items. The US moved rapidly to recognize the independence of all former Soviet republics, but by late January 1992, had established diplomatic relations with only six, including Armenia. Those met the preconditions of democratic reform, human rights, free-market economics, and control of nuclear proliferation wanted by Washington.⁵⁶ Others not recognized included Georgia, Azerbaijan, and most Central Asian Republics. Among those who feel this is in error is Paul Goble, a nationalities expert who recently left the US State De-

partment. He attributes delays in diplomatic efforts to President Bush's discomfort with happenings in the former Soviet Union, and he feels, "Everything has been done late, grudgingly, and with little advanced planning."⁵⁷

Rapid diplomatic recognition of Armenia reflects its long association with the US. Armenia claims significant international support through a large diaspora of Armenians living abroad. On 22 October 1991, Raffi Ovannisyan, a US citizen, took charge of the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He had recently served on the Board of Directors and as Head of the International Affairs Commission of the Armenian Assembly of the USA, a political-action organization representing 800,000 Armenians living in the US.⁵⁸ On 1 September, Representative Barbara Boxer, Democrat from California, on a fact-finding mission to Armenia and NKAO, called for deployment of UN peacekeeping forces to the area. The largest Armenian communities in the US are in Los Angeles and Fresno, California.⁵⁹ A similar support base for Georgians and Azerbaijanis does not exist in the US.

To date, the US has not established diplomatic relations with either Georgia or Azerbaijan. Secretary of State Baker in an address at Princeton University on 12 December 1991 described the US position:

Clearly, other governments - - for example, Georgia - - are showing already that Communism can be replaced by governments that are authoritarian - - and equally undeserving of our acceptance or support. . . . Some . . . notably Azerbaijan - - are arming themselves for war against other republics. Those who pursue these

misguided and anachronistic policies should know they will receive neither acceptance nor support from the West.⁶⁰

Since this speech, armed forces have overthrown the authoritarian Georgian president and established a provisional government. Tengiz Sigua, then head of the provisional Georgian civilian government, said he received a note 26 January from the US Embassy in Moscow stating the administration's readiness for talks on establishing diplomatic relations.⁶¹ Additional modification of the US position is evident in Secretary Baker's announcement on 5 February of plans to establish diplomatic relations rapidly with the remaining republics. State Department officials argue there is no time for ironclad commitments on issues, "They are up for grabs, and we need to make sure they look north and west and not south and east."⁶² Central to US policy in the area will be countering expanding Iranian influence that may lead to Islamic fundamentalism. The Bush administration has been consulting with Turkey and Egypt on methods to turn the region westward. America wants to use Turkey as the role model of a secular Muslim state that has been a successful member of a western alliance.⁶³

Recent moves by international organizations such as the UN, NATO, and CSCE may put pressure on the US to become more actively involved in conflict resolution in the Caucasus. Meeting with NATO and the NACC on 10 March 1992, Secretary of State Baker said concerning the proposal of the Dutch

Prime Minister to send NATO peacekeeping forces to NKR, "an idea that we think well of and that we think should certainly be considered."⁶⁴ Baker said nothing specifically about dispatching troops, but other ministers said it might be conceivable in the near future.⁶⁵

IRAN, TURKEY, AND SAUDI ARABIA

The countries in the best position due to proximity, language, and religion to influence the situation in the Caucasus are the Muslim nations of Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. These are each rapidly trying to expand influence throughout the Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union. In the region, Shiite Islam, dominant in Iran, is prevalent only in Azerbaijan while Sunni Islam, practiced by some 80 percent of Muslims, is prevalent elsewhere. Paul Goble, however, points out, "The distinction [between the two branches] is a lot less prevalent in the former Soviet republics."⁶⁶ As the republics have broken up, it appears that renewed nationalism has also taken precedence over resurgence in Islam.⁶⁷

Georgia and Armenia both have long established Orthodox Christian religions. North and South Ossetia and Tajikistan speak Persian, but Turkish-based languages are spoken elsewhere. The Georgians and Armenians have their own distinct languages.⁶⁸

Geographically, Iran is in the best position to influence Azerbaijan. They share a large international boundary. More Azerbaijanis live on the Iranian side of the border than in all of Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan ASSR combined. Azeris are the largest minority in Iran; many have longed for the Azeri people to be united, and some have described the international border as artificial.⁶⁹ Recent reports suggest Iran is rapidly building its military capability. An Iranian Army corps moved near its border with Azerbaijan and began conducting cross-border actions, and speculation suggests Iran may annex Azerbaijan.⁷⁰ Recent emphasis to revive a shattered Iranian economy and problems caused by a large refugee population would suggest otherwise. Advantages accrued through warming international relations may persuade Iran to limit territorial ambitions in the near term.⁷¹ Azerbaijan might not be that receptive to the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Under years of Soviet Marxist ideology, they have developed a more western outlook with limited opportunity for Islamic fundamentalism to take root.⁷² Turkey offers the most likely alternative.

The Turkish option offers a secular approach. While Turkey's diplomatic priority focuses toward membership in the European Community (EC), the new republics are also targets for major new initiatives.⁷³ Turkey is the West's major conduit into the region and the primary bulwark against the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. On 11 Febru-

ary 1992, President Bush at a White House meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Sulyman Demirel stated:

Turkey is indeed a friend, a partner of the United States, and it's also a model to others, especially those newly independent republics of Central Asia. In a region of changing tides, it endures as a beacon of stability. Our governments will expand that cooperation in these new republics.⁷⁴

Advances in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Accord are bringing together nations including Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia into an economic cooperation framework. Armenia offers some challenge to Turkey. For years, acknowledgement of the Turkish genocide of Armenians in 1915 and the return of "lost lands" have been the focus of Armenia's relations with Turkey. Today, the government of President Levon Ter-Petrossyan in Armenia is taking a pragmatic and realistic look at relations with Turkey.⁷⁵ This will greatly help Turkey whose only overland route into Central Asia goes through Armenia. Turkey, however, is not territorially contiguous with Azerbaijan.

Much farther away but still exercising significant influence is Saudi Arabia. Moderate Arab nations led by Saudi Arabia are exerting substantial cultural, religious, and primarily economic influence in the newly opened Muslim regions. Policies remain politically focused with military-political alliances ruled out due to lack of proximity. The moderate Arab Islamic Conference organization has invited Azerbaijan and other new republics to join their economic cooperation group. The stated purpose of the Saudi Arabian

initiatives is to prevent the new republics from sliding in the direction of Islamic radicalism.⁷⁶

CONCLUSIONS

The Caucasus remains a boiling pot where the world community has inherited the bankrupt policies of the former Soviet Union, long repressed ethnic tensions, and another strained seam between Muslims and Christians. Key questions remain unresolved. What will be the status regarding sovereignty attributed to administrative subdivisions assigned by the former Soviet Union? Will international organizations change traditional positions and become involved in what could be called a nation's internal matters? What will take priority, the sovereignty of nations or the human rights of people included in their borders? Will foreign powers intervene? Should Iran intervene supporting the Azeris in NKR, would there be an Iraqi response? If Iraq's response was to counter Iranian aggression, what position would the US take supporting Iraq in light of traditional US support of Armenia? As nations like the US, Armenia, and Russia look toward organizations like the UN, NATO, and CSCE, answers to these questions will increasingly be formed by international consensus. On 31 January 1992 at the first UN Security Council summit meeting in 46 years, President Bush and newly-seated President Yeltsin affirmed the Council's

responsibility for international peacemaking and pledged to seek ways of making it better.⁷⁷

What does the future hold for the Caucasus? In the near term, more bloodshed and violence. International consensus is hard to build. Strained peacekeeping budgets and economic problems persist, however, in nations who would be major players. Peacekeeping forces remain in Lebanon, and after decades of effort, true peace is still not at hand. Faced with so many potential conflicts in the region, the international community may be ready to sit this one out, letting the strong prevail while easing the suffering of the innocent. Recent diplomatic activity, however, might suggest otherwise. Both regional powers and international organizations are aggressively seeking solutions to conflicts in places like NKR. Although fighting continues and no settlement is yet at hand, bold initiatives are being taken that may once again bring peace to this troubled land.

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